

The Roots of Jazz in North Carolina

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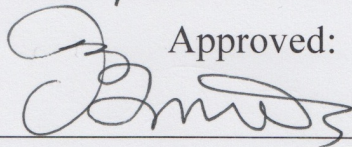
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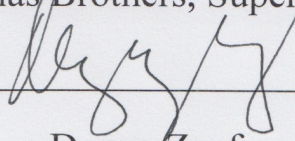
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The Roots of Jazz in North Carolina

An analysis of the musical heritage of the Tar Heel State and its connection to jazz greats

North Carolina is not known for its jazz music. When you think about the hubs of jazz, New Orleans, New York, Chicago, and Kansas City come to mind—but not High Point, Rocky Mount, or Badin. However, several of the most influential jazz artists of the 20th century were born or raised in North Carolina, including Thelonious Monk, Max Roach, John Coltrane, Nina Simone, and Lou Donaldson.

Pianist Billy Taylor—also born in North Carolina—said it was coincidence that these musicians all came from the same state (Wright and Higby 55). But I think he failed to look closely enough at the threads that connect the artists and their home state. While the state lacked a thriving jazz scene, it had its own vibrant musical heritage that included both sacred and secular music. From the fields to inside the church walls, black North Carolinians developed their own regional variations of musical styles and integrated music as a basic element of their everyday lives.

By delving into to key musical traditions of North Carolina in the 19th and early 20th centuries, both sacred and secular forms, we will uncover ways in which these musicians connected with that music and reveal aspects of the influence that North Carolina had on their music, and by extension, on jazz music on the whole. Taken together, the musical styles I highlight—string band music, lining out, Piedmont blues, and shout band music—demonstrate common characteristics of rhythmic drive and emotional energy that would have deeply influenced any African-American musician in the state. While these elements aren't unique to

North Carolina music, we can't discount the impact that the music, along with other aspects of life in the state, would likely have had on the musicians who lived here.

And though the musicians I mentioned didn't live in North Carolina their entire lives—or even past early childhood in some cases—their families had lived there for generations, first as slaves, and then as free African Americans. These artists—and, as important, their parents—would have assimilated the state's influence in ways that aren't so easily separated, even after years of living in the North.

Setting the Stage

The players

Thelonious Monk, Max Roach, John Coltrane, Nina Simone, Lou Donaldson—these are the most influential jazz musicians with strong ties to North Carolina. In fact, they are some of the most influential jazz musicians, period. But they aren't the only musicians to come from the state; one could easily delve into the lives of artists including the Heath Brothers (Jimmy, Percy, and Tootie). If we extend the borders just 10 miles to the south, we could add in Dizzy Gillespie, one of the originators of be-bop. Billy Strayhorn, who composed many of Duke Ellington's hits, spent the summers of his childhood with his grandparents in Hillsborough, North Carolina. If we stretch the definition of jazz, we can include great funk musicians such Maceo Parker and George Clinton. The musical heritage and connections I will examine mostly apply to all of these artists, too, but I focus on these select few from North Carolina to help constrain the breadth of this work.

For those who aren't versed in jazz history, it may be helpful to understand the impact of these musicians as well as their personal histories in the state.

- **Thelonious Monk:** Monk, a pianist, was born in 1917 in Rocky Mount, which is in the northeast section of the state. He moved with his family to New York City when he was four years old. Monk was a part of the formation of bebop, playing in the jams at New York City's Minton's Playhouse with Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker in the 1940s. But while he played with and influenced the biggest names in jazz, his own genius wasn't recognized until later. He composed several classic jazz songs, including "Round Midnight." Jazz critic Gary Giddins said, "No voice in American music was more autonomous and secure than Monk's" (309).
- **Max Roach:** Roach, a drummer, was born in 1924 in Newland, in the eastern part of the state by the Virginia border. He also moved to New York City with his family when he was four. Roach's most well-known work came in collaboration with trumpeter Clifford Brown. Roach pioneered the rhythms of bebop; he and drummer Kenny Clark are credited with introducing "droppin' bombs" into the bebop vocabulary—a method of drumming that relies on keeping time on the ride cymbal and incorporates irregular accents on the snare and bass drum.
- **John Coltrane:** Coltrane, a saxophonist, was born in 1926 in Hamlet, a small town in south-central North Carolina, though he lived in High Point in the central region of the state for most of his residency. He moved to Philadelphia to join members of his family in 1943 when he finished high school. Coltrane played with Dizzy Gillespie, but made his name as part of Miles Davis's quintet in the 1950s. He achieved celebrity (and notoriety) in the 1960s for his ambitious "free" jazz experimentations. He played on one of the most popular jazz albums ever,

Davis's *Kind of Blue*, and his own album *A Love Supreme* continues to be an influential and revered recording.

- **Nina Simone:** Born Eunice Waymon in 1933 in the western North Carolina resort town of Tryon, Simone played piano and sang. She left the state in 1950. Her style wasn't strictly jazz—she defined herself as a folk artist—but more a mix of jazz, blues, and classical. Her early work was especially steeped in jazz traditions.
- **Lou Donaldson:** Donaldson, a saxophonist, was born in 1926 in Badin, near Charlotte. Donaldson lived in North Carolina until 1950, when he moved to New York City. Donaldson recorded dozens of albums for Blue Note Records. He was one of the innovators of hard bop, a bluesy style of jazz that emerged in the 1950s.

Each of these musicians made a demonstrable impact on the direction of jazz. And, as I will explore, each brought an element of North Carolina into the jazz lexicon, even if the influence was indirect—in some cases, the cultural impact the state had on them and their families in the 19th and early 20th centuries was as important as the musical heritage.

The state of things: African Americans in North Carolina 1860s – 1950s

North Carolina, like the entire South, saw a great deal of change during the Civil War and the decades after. The state transformed from an agrarian slave state to a more industrialized economy, saw rapid improvements in infrastructure, and witnessed repressive political efforts, all in a span of less than a hundred years. The political and economic environment would have affected the families of the future jazz musicians and further influenced their outlook—and the impact the state had on their art.

Though a slave state, North Carolina was known to have more integration among blacks and whites than neighboring states in the 1800s. This was in part because of the many small farms throughout the state, which needed fewer slaves than the larger plantations that dominated South Carolina and Virginia. Though slaves still had no freedom, they often worked side-by-side with whites. Building on that integration after Emancipation, blacks became very involved in the state's political process. North Carolina had the highest voter turnout in the South among blacks and the most engaged black political organization in the 1880s and 1890s (Ayers 169). But, following trends in other Southern states, the whites aggressively fought against equality, and as a result North Carolina saw the greatest amount of racial conflict in the political realm (Ayers 107). Whites used the legal system to disenfranchise blacks through Jim Crow laws and legalized segregation with the Plessy versus Ferguson—"separate but equal"—court case. Because of this, future musicians like John Coltrane and Lou Donaldson grew up in a more segregated environment than their parents.

Coupled with deteriorating race relations, shifts in economics meant that many black people—especially in rural areas—struggled to make ends meet. After Emancipation, the blacks who stayed in North Carolina mostly stuck with the work they knew: farming. But the arrival of railroads brought new opportunities in the late 1800s and helped cities like Durham grow quickly. Still, work was often difficult to come by for blacks throughout the state. The combination of limited economic opportunities and overt racism led many blacks to move north in the early 20th century as part of the Great Migration. Most of the families of these artists left to pursue a better life in Philadelphia or New York.

Amidst all the political and economic turmoil, the sounds of North Carolina pervaded life for its residents. Music came from the churches and the fields, homes and the factories. Styles

such as lining out, string band music, Piedmont blues, and gospel were part of the everyday existence of African Americans in North Carolina. The future jazz musicians would have lived through, around, and in this music. Inevitably, it would become a part of their musical vocabulary.

In the following sections, I will examine the sacred and secular music that was popular in North Carolina. This is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of musical trends in North Carolina, but a look at some specific examples of sacred and secular music that had distinctive North Carolina flavors.

The 19th Century: Songs of Joy and Freedom

Leading up to the Civil War, slaves lived under bleak conditions. Historian Jeffrey Crow, in his book *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*, said, “the inescapable tasks of most black North Carolinians were endure bondage and live with oppression” (51). In the early part of the 1800s, race tensions in North Carolina and throughout the South increased, as slaves increasingly resisted their conditions. Nat Turner’s uprising in Virginia put North Carolina’s whites on guard, and the legislators created laws to make it harder for slaves to be freed.

But in that hostile situation, the black population increased in the state. By 1860, the state counted 361,522 blacks (30,463 of whom were free), up from 140,000 in 1800 (Crow 51). In general, blacks performed the hard labor—including picking tobacco and cotton, and cutting down timber. Blacks turned to religion and family to get through, and found ways to carry on the African traditions of integrating music and the arts into their lives through hymns and folk songs.

After the Civil War, African Americans in North Carolina celebrated freedom —both in work and religion. Their release meant they could more freely express themselves in song, which took the form of dance music and church music. They were free to sing what they wanted as they worked the fields and founded their own churches so they could pray as they pleased. While the joy they felt in freedom would soon sour as whites tried to take away their rights, the music they created would help shape the way they lived—with optimism and great emotion.

19th Century Secular Music in North Carolina: In the String of

Things

Slave owners who controlled the lives of blacks in the early and mid 19th century did their best to prevent songs for entertainment—secular music, or music not for religious purposes—from being a part of their slaves' lives. While sacred music was reluctantly permitted, slave owners' desire to squash any spirit of independence in their slaves deterred many blacks from expressing themselves through folk music. Laws were even written to discourage slaves from dancing. But legislation couldn't stop secular music completely. African-American culture has always been deeply entwined with music. Lawrence W. Levine, in his book *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, explained that music was central to the daily lives of slaves. African Americans integrated music in work, in prayer, and for play—"every possible purpose" (6).

Frequently played on the sly, secular music provided African Americans in North Carolina with an avenue for "amusement and complaint"—whether as "sinful tunes" sung by slaves, folk ballads like "John Henry" that offered hope in the face of oppression, or in solid rhythms of string band music (Gavins 432). And after Emancipation, secular music flourished in African-American communities.

String Band Music

Of the varieties of secular music, the plucky melodies and syncopated rhythms of string band music particularly attracted the people of North Carolina. The main role of a string band was to get people dancing. String bands were found throughout the United States and each region had a twist on the formula; in New Orleans, for example, string bands featured banjo, violin, guitar,

mandolin, and string bass (Brothers 151). The North Carolina style usually featured a fiddle and a banjo. They played in an up-tempo style that spurred people to move.

String band music resonated from the coast to the mountains. According to Cecilia Conway, a folklore specialist at Appalachian State University, the banjo first came ashore in eastern North Carolina in the late 1700s and worked its way westward to the Piedmont before making it to the Appalachian Mountains (152). Musician and old-time music scholar Bob Carlin cites firsthand accounts of string band music in Davie County and Salisbury in the 1830s (68). The fiddle and banjo came together in the Appalachians as early as the first quarter of the 19th century, where they accompanied dances (66). By the middle 1800s, wherever you went in the Tar Heel state you were likely to hear the percussive plink of the banjo accompanying shrill melodies bowed on a fiddle.

Born from a union of African and European musical traditions, string band music crossed racial barriers. Both whites and blacks played string band music, and in some areas they even played together. The banjo's roots can be traced to West Africa, with an earlier variant brought over by slaves (Carlin 32). Conway notes the first documented appearance in 1740 of the African banjer—a fretless gourd instrument that had a short drone thumbstring and was played using a downstroke (150). Both of these would become characteristic details of North Carolina banjo playing. Meanwhile, the fiddle came to America by way of Scottish and Irish immigrants, though African Americans quickly adopted it and recognized it as similar to a one-string fiddle-like instrument that was found in Africa (Conway 152).

Before the Civil War, a black person's lot in life—and options for musical expression—was greatly determined by where he or she lived in the state, as North Carolina's slave culture varied by region. Statewide, the average slave owner had one slave, and there were few of the

large plantations that dominated South Carolina and Virginia (Crow 56). This was especially the case in the mountain and Piedmont regions. As a result, in these areas blacks and whites worked more closely together, and the opportunities for cultures to mix expanded. Deborah J. Thompson, an Appalachian studies expert, explains that "because slave-owning households in the mountains were generally smaller than lowland plantations and existed alongside non-slave owning households, blacks and white were perhaps more likely to associate with one another in Appalachia than in other parts of the South" (71). The Appalachians didn't offer equality for African Americans, but the area represented a greater chance for interaction. John Coltrane's paternal great-grandparents were slaves in the central Piedmont region, where they lived on family farms and worked side-by-side with the owners (Tegnell 194), and they could have engaged in interracial musical combinations, or at least heard string band music frequently.

However, on the North Carolina coast, larger plantations dominated, and more slaves were used to farm the land. Thelonious Monk's great-grandfather was owned by the Monk family in Sampson County; the Monks had 19 slaves just before the Civil War broke out (Kelley 4). Though not large compared to plantations in South Carolina and Virginia, that number was well above the North Carolina average. Coltrane's maternal grandparents were born slaves on a 1,000-acre plantation in Chowan County, also on the coast (Tegnell 170). They lived with about 100 other slaves. On large plantations like that, slaves lived in slave quarters and worked in groups, while the owners mostly oversaw the operations. As a result, the slaves had fewer opportunities to explore secular music, at least until the end of the Civil War.

A Sound of Freedom

After the Civil War, freedom for the slaves meant they could play the music they wanted, and string band reels proved popular with everyone, especially in rural areas. Dances and community

events were common places to hear banjos and fiddles. African Americans had “frolics,” while whites had “square dances.” Glenn Hinson, an associate professor of folklore and anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, says that at these occasions the community would come together to dance as the musicians called “eight-hand sets, African-American square dances that emphasized circles figures and fancy, rhythmically precise stepping” (1). Neighbors came from all around to take part.

Freed from slavery, many African-American families in North Carolina stayed in rural areas and turned to sharecropping to earn money, including Coltrane’s paternal great-grandparents, Andrew and Mary Ann Coltrane. They did well enough that in 1881 Mary Ann purchased a nine-acre farm near Liberty, North Carolina, and Coltrane’s grandparents would farm the land there, too (Tegnell 192). Monk’s grandfather Hinton ended up becoming a sharecropper on John Carr Monk’s land—the same land Monk’s great-grandfather had worked as a slave (Kelley 7). Max Roach’s family settled in the Dismal Swamp area of eastern North Carolina, near the Virginia border, where his father farmed (Maggin). It’s likely that the Coltranes, Monks, and Roaches soaked in string band music at community gatherings and even while they worked.

In the tradition of work songs, string bands provided the soundtrack to tobacco curings, corn shuckings, and other repetitive tasks of rural communities. The farmers plucked the banjo and bowed the fiddle to while away the time, and, in the case of tobacco curing, stay awake. Tobacco curing required a continuous fire for several days, and people tending the fire would play music to keep interested. Even if you weren’t participating in the farm work, you probably heard the music if you lived in the country. The wide-open spaces of rural North Carolina let

sound carry—and there weren't any motor vehicles to cover up the sound. Fiddler Joe Thompson said he could hear people playing at a tobacco curing a half-mile or more away (Carlin 21).

Urban areas also had their fair share of string band music in the community. In an essay about a neighborhood of Charlotte called Brooklyn—also known as Second Ward—Rose Leary Love says she “vividly remembers banjo pickers frequently seen in the streets or standing on a corner plunking out a melody” (12). String band music was truly the sound in the air in North Carolina.

The Sounds of String Bands

String bands entertained crowds and got them on their feet. They usually offered a variety of songs that spanned cultures. “A repertoire was created that was one-third from the black side, one-third from the white side and one-third from outside sources such as the American popular music of Tin Pan Alley” (Carlin 68). Selections ranged from ballads (narrative pieces like “John Henry” and “Boll Weevil”), to barn dance tunes for set dances and rags (fast ragtime rhythms for solo and couple dances) (Hinson 2).

While I could find no audio recordings of how string bands sounded at their height, studio recordings and field recordings in the 20th century provide a sample of what farmers and dancers throughout North Carolina may have heard, as well as what people throughout the country experienced. After all, string band music was far from a Southeastern specialty. Variants can be found from New Orleans to New York. Recordings from New York band Ciro's Club Coon Orchestra in 1915 (republished on *The Earliest Black String Bands Vol. 1 1914-1917*) show a similar percussive drive on the banjo, but the instrumentation differs from a typical North Carolina group—the New York band features three or four banjos, a cello instead of a violin, and even piano on some songs. The vocals by Seth Jones sound more like jazz age crooner Al Jolson

than a square dance call. And songs like “On the Shore at Lei-Lei-Wei” emphasize the melody more than examples recorded by North Carolina musicians, which tend to favor strong rhythm. Orange County’s Joe and Odell Thompson’s “Georgia Buck”—recorded in 1970s but played in keeping with turn-of-the-century traditions—lacks the polish of the songs of Ciro’s Club Coon Orchestra and Joan Sawyer’s Persian Garden Orchestra (also found on *The Earliest Black String Bands Vol. 1 1914-1917*), but they make up for it by keeping a focused rhythm that lays a steady foundation for dancing. Cousins Odell and Joe Thompson were born in 1911 and 1918, respectively; Odell played banjo and Joe handled the fiddle. They learned their instruments from their fathers, who played set dances during the height of string band music’s popularity (Hinson 9).

A 1926 recording by the Kansas City Blues Strummers offers another variation on the style. “String Band Blues” features banjo and fiddle, but also uses a tuba to keep a steady beat. As the band name and song titles suggests, the group implemented elements of the blues into their style, a form that didn’t develop until the early 20th century, but the essence of their music is in tune with Joe and Odell Thompson’s—simple songs for dancing. The banjo emphasizes the beat with downstrokes, while the violin plays the melody above it. However, the vocals more closely resemble those found on the Ciro’s Club Coon Orchestra recordings—emphasizing the melody and featuring drawn-out syllables that accentuate the lyrics.

Influence of String Band Music

Elements of string band music, consciously or subconsciously, can be heard in the playing styles of the jazz musicians who came from the state. Thelonious Monk was well known for playing piano in a rather unique percussive style, while some of his contemporaries, like Art Tatum, preferred a fluid, fast approach. A percussive approach to making music—common in many

forms of African music—is also an element of string band music. His percussive style on songs like 1954’s “Blue Monk” resemble the stilted rhythm of a banjo played in the clawhammer style. Monk bangs hard on the keys a certain times to emphasize a beat. On Miles Davis’ 1954 recording of “Bag’s Groove,” Monk hammers down on the keys, pauses, hits another key, pauses. We can hear the influence of percussive attack on a very different piece of music from John Snipes, a North Carolina banjo player. In his version of “The Coo Coo” on *Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia*, he picks each note aggressively with a downstroke, clawhammer style. This produces an effect similar to Monk’s hammering each key individually: both impart vitality and establish strong rhythms to propel the music forward—and get people moving, too.

While violin and banjo were the core instruments of North Carolina strings bands, they were hardly the only musical elements. Bands incorporated accordions, harmonicas, and percussion to enhance the spirited music (Hinson 5). In many songs, percussion played the variable rhythm, when in other forms of music percussion is assigned the fixed rhythm. Instead, the banjo held the steady beat while instruments such as drums or spoons adding rhythmic interest and complexity to the songs. In her version of “Corrina” on *Eight-Hand Sets and Holy Steps*, banjoist Elizabeth “Babe” Reid is accompanied by someone playing “bones”—hitting together the ribs from a cow to create a clacking sound. The bones become the dominant sound in the song, while Reid keeps the fixed rhythm on her banjo. Another variation on this comes from Joe and Odell Thompson, along with banjoist Tommy Thompson, in their version of “Old Brown Jug” on *Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia*. In the song Odell Thompson plays “hambone”—slapping the body to provide the variable rhythm (this tradition is more commonly called “patting juba”). He begins at 0:06 into the song, just after the fiddle states

the song's melody. His slaps add rhythmic interest to a repetitive tune, providing contrast and making the song feel faster. You can hear a similar approach in John Coltrane's 1963 composition "India." In that song he uses two basses instead of one. While one bass keeps a steady beat, the other keeps a similar, though different, beat behind it until 0:47, when the second bass starts a variable rhythm to play in front, behind, and around the first bass. The second bass increases the complexity of the music, just as the bones and hambone did for string band music. Monk used this technique, too, often stomping his right foot to accent off-beat phrasing (Kelley 231).

Improvisation is a hallmark of jazz, and the act of composing on the fly is integral to string band music, too. In the booklet that accompanies *Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia*, Cecelia Conway and Scott Odell note that North Carolina string bands played dances where songs could last an hour (4), playing variations on a single melody and improvising parts throughout to keep themselves and their listeners entertained. "Little Brown Jug" from that album again offers an excellent example of the improvisational spirit of string band music. We hear the musicians talking at the beginning, even after the fiddle has started. One of the performers suggests, "Do that hambone," and Odell Thompson jumps in. The spontaneity of the moment demonstrates that this is true unplanned improvisation, yet Odell picks up the tune and moves it along without missing a beat. His outburst at 0:29—"You didn't know I could do that, did you"—confirms that the part had been improvised.

While all jazz musicians are expected to improvise, Coltrane was especially known for his extensive improvised solos. Lewis Porter, in his biography of Coltrane, says that Coltrane liked to "repeat and develop short motifs in his improvisations," especially in his later works when his African and Indian influences were most obvious (209). Monk was also known as a

master improviser. Speaking about playing with Monk, Coltrane said, “Rhythmically, for example, Monk creates such tension that it makes the horn players *think* instead of falling into regular patterns. He may start a phrase from somewhere you don’t expect, and you have to know what to do. And harmonically, he’ll go different ways than you anticipate” (Kelley 230).

The Wane of String Bands

Strings bands decreased in popularity throughout the country in the early 20th century as blues became the more popular style, but in North Carolina string bands never disappeared; in fact they remained quite common, especially in rural settings, until the middle of the century. Carlin wrote that “in spite of all the influence from outside music and groups, the most popular ensembles for grass roots community events continued to be fiddle- and banjo-led string bands” (20). The bands adapted to the tastes of the times, adding in elements of blues, R&B, and jazz as those genres developed. And though it was born as an interracial collaboration, the legacy of string bands diverged as race relations further soured in the state; while African Americans favored blues, whites took the music in the direction of bluegrass, which continued to place emphasis on banjos and fiddles.

You can still hear string bands at many events in North Carolina, such as the annual Festival for the Eno River over the July 4th weekend in Durham—Joe Thompson used to play the festival frequently before his death in 2012. In the 21st century, we’ve seen the Carolina Chocolate Drops achieve nationwide popularity with their take on the string band tradition—which they learned in part from Joe Thompson—and they won a Grammy Award in 2010 for their album *Genuine Negro Jig*.

Sacred Music in 19th Century North Carolina: Lined Up and Ready

Slaves were allowed few chances to gather and rejoice. Religion offered one of those opportunities. Under repressive conditions, African Americans adapted Christian religious music and made it their own. Once freed from slavery, African Americans flocked to newly forming black churches, and further developed their own sacred music, to celebrate their freedom and find their own ways of praising God. Through the music created in the churches, music permeated the lives of African Americans in North Carolina. And since the country was yet to be interconnected by railroads and other forms of rapid transportation, regional styles of sacred music dominated, including a variation of call-and-response with a North Carolina flavor.

African American Religion Before the 20th Century

As with most of the customs they had before they were enslaved, Africans weren't allowed to practice their native religions as slaves. While many slave owners discouraged participation in any religion—thinking it made slaves feel proud and less suitable servants—Christians made outreach efforts in the 18th century (Southern 40). Despite the initial resistance of slave owners, Christianity slowly but surely drew converts among the slaves (Crow 26). Throughout the southern colonies, Anglican missionaries worked to instruct slaves in the ways of Christianity. In her book *The Music of Black Americans*, Eileen Southern says that when it came to Christian activities, the slaves preferred the musical aspect of the religious experience most of all (41).

In the 19th century, churches in the South provided the best opportunities for fellowship and education for blacks, as well as religious instruction (Southern 145). Slaves received religious instruction in several ways, depending on their situation: in some areas they were allowed to go to church with their owners; in others, they had their own churches under the leadership of whites; and some even had their own churches led by black preachers (Southern

166). Regardless of the situation, religious instruction always included psalms and hymns. While whites were cautious about these activities, they did see an advantage in teaching psalms and hymns—they were viewed as a way to stop the slaves from singing chants brought over from Africa. Since slaves continued African traditions of integrating music into every aspect of their lives, they often sang while they worked in the fields. After being converted to Christianity, it was common for songs they learned during religious instruction to be sung in daily life, not just in religious settings (Southern 146). Religion was also used to reinforce obedience, as white preachers would instruct slaves to obey their masters—obedience as a religious message (Crow 62). But even while overtly being instructed in the white ways of worship and sacred music, slaves found opportunities to pursue religion in their own ways with secret prayer meetings where they would “seek deliverance and voice their longing for justice,” Crow says (62). In addition to learning European hymns, African Americans also created their own religious folk songs known as spirituals (Southern 166). The white churches discouraged these “unofficial” religious songs, but they only became more common. Spirituals were “pieces whose messages of prayer, thanksgiving, and testimony issued forth in an exultant flow of inspired melody and impassioned voices” (Hinson 5).

By the eve of Emancipation, slaves in North Carolina were a Christian group on the whole (Crow 69). And they believed that God would set them free. Though the prospect of equality was often dangled before blacks in the first years following the Civil War, the only true freedom African Americans saw was in religion. Thomas Brothers says that “of all the promises implied by emancipation, one was kept and exploited. That was the opportunity to establish independent churches” (36). And they established churches that reflected their own values. Blacks were free to move away from a white experience of Christianity and faith and create their

own experience. Crow notes, “Not surprisingly, then, black people, having attained their freedom, poured into churches controlled by blacks and into denominations such as the Baptists, who favored independent, locally controlled congregations” (82). In addition to many blacks choosing the Baptist church, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion church arrived in North Carolina after the Civil War and quickly found a following among African Americans. A.M.E. Zion was known as the freedom church for its efforts to help slaves escape and high profile members such as Harriet Tubman (Williams).

Churches offered African Americans community, and for some, new career opportunities. Interestingly, several of the jazz musicians from North Carolina had relatives who worked as preachers. W.W. Blair, John Coltrane’s maternal grandfather, held several important posts in the A.M.E. Zion church; his paternal grandfather W.H. Coltrane was also a minister within that church (Tegnell 184). Lou Donaldson’s father was an A.M.E. Zion minister, too. Nina Simone’s mother was a Methodist minister and her father sang in the choir. Through these connections sacred music became an everyday element for the future musicians.

Music in the Churches

The power of music was central to African-American faith; it inhabited all areas of worship (Hinson 6). It wasn’t about entertainment—singing was seen as an act of praise, one that helped to focus spirituality. It was in that saturated environment that the future jazz musicians of North Carolina grew up. Lou Donaldson said that by the time he was four or five he’d learned all the spirituals and hymns from being around his father’s church. He used to sing in the church choir, which his mother directed (Gowan). John Coltrane participated weekly in the services at St. Stephen Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church (Thomas 13). As mentioned, Nina Simone’s father led the church choir, her siblings sang in the choir, and her mother sang and preached in

churches throughout the western North Carolina region. Simone accompanied her mother often. “I got to know the inside of a good many churches,” she wrote in her autobiography, *I Put a Spell on You* (17).

Most music in 19th century black congregations was sung and only accompanied with hand claps and the stomping of feet—no instruments (Hinson 6). Spirituals and hymns were commonly sung in most churches. In the Southeast, a call-and-response form of hymn called lining out—in which the text is read or chanted by worship leader and then sung by congregation—anchored congregational singing throughout the area and was especially popular in North Carolina and South Carolina (Dargan 34). Also known as Dr. Watts (as well as meter hymns, wording out, deaconing, long meter, or the old one-hundreds), the tradition grew out of a hymn collection published by Reverend Isaac Watts that was popular in England and American in the 18th and 19th centuries. People who couldn’t read—both black and white—would learn the hymns by repeating lines after they were first sung by the congregation leader (Southern 31). As the main method of learning hymns, lining out became engrained in African-American worship. Dargan says that before Emancipation, lining out provided a European mask for African expression and rhythms—a form of self-expression that the white owners didn’t seek to suppress (34).

Lining out singing styles ranged from moaning to shouting, and in some cases they started with reflective moaning and move to the celebratory shout as a reflection of the intensity of worship (Dargan 35). Moaned hymns were usually slow in tempo and featured blue note (a note sung at a slightly lower pitch) inflection and slides; one sentence was often repeated two or three times in a moan (38). Shout styles, on the other hand, would accelerate in tempo throughout the piece and featured complex rhythms produced by hands, feet, and body

movement (41). Though lining out was practiced throughout the Southeast, regional differences developed in how the music was sung, thanks to the complex web of ties between Baptist and Methodist congregations (54). Since it is an oral tradition, each group would sing it a little differently, and, in the African tradition, add personal interpretations. Like a dialect, regional singing tradition can be distinguished by ensemble textures (such as unison, organum polyphony, or triadic harmony), call-and-response structures, and emphasis on moaning or shouting. Dargan says the Carolinas favored the shout style more than moaning, though both were in use (58). Two branches of shout style emerged in the Southeast: a cross-rhythm style favored in Georgia (especially the Sea Islands) and an offbeat syncopated rhythm popular in North Carolina and South Carolina. The offbeat style popular in North Carolina demonstrated fast rhythms established with hand claps and body movement (and might even end in spirit possession). As you moved farther north in the state toward Virginia, Dargan says people favored more moderate tempos and a focus on tune-based melodies, rather than the impassioned shout (42).

The Sound of Lining Out

While we only have descriptions of lining out at congregations in the 18th and 19th century, the tradition has continued to the present day in the Southeast. Recordings from the 20th century offer a glimpse into the style as it was likely heard in the late 19th century.

In most lining out traditions, the congregations sang a small repertoire, often fewer than 10 hymns. Selections usually included “Amazing Grace,” “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say,” and “Come Ye That Love the Lord.” All lined out songs had certain common characteristics, whether in the shout or moan style (Dargan 28). Most prominently, congregations sing them in a slow and deliberate fashion. Tempo interpretations vary from region to region, though. On the CD that accompanies the book *Benjamin Lloyd’s Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition*, the

Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church from Elkin, North Carolina, approaches “Dark and Thorny Is the Desert” at a moderate pace in the shout style that was popular throughout the state. The first two lines are sung solo by a woman, and then the congregation repeats them, though slower than the leader had sung them. By the third call and response, at about 1:40, the tempo increases, as does the rise of individual voices above the chorus. Every once a while a few claps add rhythmic accents. The pace continues to increase throughout the hymn, until the piece ends after 5:30 with a spirit of jubilation that wasn’t present at the beginning. In another example of shout style, the United Southern Prayer Band, from St. Hebron Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, sings “I Heard the Voice of Jesus” on *Wade in the Water, Vol. 2*, but the tempo is slower compared to the approach from the North Carolina singers. The leader calls out the hymn and the time (“common meter”), then starts the first line: “I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘Come unto me and rest.’” The congregation then slowly sings the line, stretching each syllable, adding their own intonation and emphasis. At the 2:14 mark, a few of the singers start syncopated hand claps, and the pace and volume increases a bit. The song never moves quickly, but it does increase in tempo slightly, and the vocal embellishments increase. Compare both of those shout hymns to the moan style performed by the Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church on “O May I Worthy Prove to See” from *Benjamin Lloyd’s Hymn Book*. The most noticeable difference in the styles is the annunciation and length of each syllable—the moan style tends toward more what Dargan calls “glottal groans,” softer and often sung with closed lips, which make the words fairly indistinguishable during the response (35). The result is that moaned hymns feel more subdued than shout styles. Shout style is also characterized by upper range vocals, whereas the moan styles dwell in lower registers.

Like most black sacred music—whether singing hymns from the Dr. Watts European tradition or more recent spirituals that grew from the fields and plantations—the lined out performances were always personal, allowing for each singer to vary the interpretations to match their own feelings. As in string band music—and jazz—improvisation was welcomed and even expected. Hinson said, “Congregational singing ... sounded forth as a symphony of improvisation and personal statement, the individual voices all blending together in an exultant offering of praise” (6). In the examples above, these improvisations can be heard in the way individual voices break free of the choir at unpredictable intervals; the spirit takes a singer, and he or she gets louder or switches to a higher pitch to express it—much like a jazz soloist will do when improvising.

The Influence of Sacred Music and Lining Out

The role of sacred music in shaping musical vocabulary can’t be overemphasized when it comes to jazz musicians, including those from North Carolina. With the deep roots most of them had in their religious communities—the children or grandchildren of preachers in several cases—they would have soaked in the elements of sacred music. Even in the families that left North Carolina early in the 20th century, like the Monks and Roaches, they attended churches in the North that maintained many of the same musical practices.

Since the practice of lining out was so prevalent throughout North Carolina, it would likely have been a part of the musician’s musical reference library. As a vocalist, Nina Simone shows a frequent affinity for the mannerisms of lining out. Especially in her earlier, more jazz-focused works, Simone favored slower songs in which she would draw out words across several beats. On “Don’t Smoke in Bed” from her 1958 debut album *Little Girl Blue*, she stretches her

pronunciation of words in each line: “Do-oh-oh-n’t smoke in be-ed;” “Don’t smo-oh-ke in be-ed.” This sounds very similar to the moan style of lining out.

Though lined out songs had no instrumental accompaniment, the congregation added rhythmic interest through hand claps, stomps, and body motion. Max Roach was known as one of the innovators of the “dropping bombs” style of drumming, which has a lot in common with the lining out tradition. For example, on his 1955 recording with Clifford Brown of “Parisian Thoroughfare,” Roach keeps the steady beat on his cymbals and reserves his drums for accents (or dropping bombs). This sounds remarkably like the occasional hand claps that help stir the congregation during “Dark and Thorny Is the Desert.”

While John Coltrane was famous for his speed and adventurous improvisations, the influence of sacred music was very prominent in his later career. His signature album, 1965’s *A Love Supreme*, is a religious composition; in its fourth part, called “Psalm,” one can hear similarities to lined out hymns. Throughout Coltrane plays a slow, almost chant-like melody on the saxophone. The tune relies heavily on lower tones, with a few accents of higher pitches. Like shout hymns, it builds in intensity over the course of the song, and the drums are used mainly for accent rather than keeping a steady beat. But the tempo remains deliberate and never gets too quick, in keeping with the lining out tradition. While I’m not suggesting that Coltrane was mimicking lining out in this piece, his composition does exhibit elements common to the style.

A Living Tradition

While lining out is no longer necessary to overcome illiteracy in a congregation, the practice continues in churches throughout the Southeast, though it isn’t as prevalent as it once was. A survey conducted in 1979 by William Crowder of 75 North and South Carolina Baptist and Methodist churches found that 28 used lined out hymns. But the modern version has evolved

with the times and now may include instrumental accompaniment (Crowder 75). Dargan documented many churches in South Carolina that continued the practice in the 1980s. A search of YouTube shows multiple congregations that still practice lining out to this day. It's unclear if the regional differences Dargan identified still exist, but what is clear is that this method of call-and-response still has a vital place in many churches.

The 20th Century: Repression, Deliverance, and Escape

By the end of 19th century, much of the hope that African Americans felt about their lives in North Carolina had diminished. At the beginning of the 20th century, North Carolina's whites legislated changes that disenfranchised blacks and reversed many of the advances they had seen after Emancipation. Jim Crow laws denied them the right to vote. "Separate but equal" forced blacks to use separate accommodations in public that were usually not equal.

In the economic world, North Carolina offered few opportunities for blacks. As manufacturing jobs developed, most of those factory jobs went to whites. Only one in seven blacks worked in manufacturing (Crow 121). Few held positions in professional fields like medicine or law—in 1940 the state had just 26 blacks lawyers (121). Though there were exceptions like Durham, most African Americans continued to work on the farm, while the economy of the state shifted away from it. It's no wonder that the black population of the state shrank. In 1860, about one-third of the population in North Carolina was black; by 1940, 27 percent of the population was African American.

But the hardships in politics and economics didn't hamper developments in music; perhaps it even served to inspire changes in song. Lines between sacred and secular music blurred, and the two co-existed more frequently. Blues musicians sang spirituals, and spirituals greatly influenced the blues. From these music traditions, the new genre of jazz bloomed, and the musicians from North Carolina branched out and made their mark on its sound—bringing with them some North Carolina style.

Secular Music in 20th Century North Carolina: Getting the Blues

As race relations deteriorated at the end of the 19th century, secular music in North Carolina expanded. In his book *Red River Blues*, historian Bruce Bastin says African Americans enjoyed a great range of secular music options, even as their political rights eroded (33). The growing railroad system made it easier and faster for music to travel throughout the country. In the early 20th century, records and radio made it possible to share music on a mass scale, and music in the United States grew less regional. The styles of music grew, too. Along with late 19th century genres like ragtime and the previously discussed string band music tradition, North Carolinians enjoyed musical entertainment that expanded through the early part of the 20th century to include jazz and blues. But even in a more connected country, the state had its own take on the major music trends.

If there's a defining musical characteristic of jazz musicians from North Carolina, it's the blues. That's what Lou Donaldson says. "In North Carolina, we played more bluesy, more soulful. That's the only way you could work down there. Back then you played for dancing. If you didn't play dance music, you just about lost your job," he said in a 2010 interview. The Piedmont blues laid the foundations for that soulful style.

Big Losses and Small Gains for North Carolina African Americans

North Carolina—along with the South in general—experienced dramatic changes in politics, business, and cultural life in the late 19th century. Following the hope that emerged from Reconstruction, whites in North Carolina waged a political war to disenfranchise blacks. According to Ayers, North Carolina witnessed the greatest amount of racial conflict in the political realm of any Southern state (107). Crow calls the period from 1877-1900 a complex time for black North Carolinians. While the community experienced growth, crushing reverses in

laws led to the lowest point in the quest for equal rights (95). So-called Jim Crow laws legalized “separate but equal” policies, and North Carolina, which had been less segregated during slavery than many Southern states due to its smaller farms and lower number of slaves, became one of the most segregated.

But even as blacks lost traction in their quest for equality, North Carolina as a whole saw progress in business, and that helped some African Americans, too. In his book *Southern Crossings: a History of the American South 1877-1906*, Edward L. Ayers wrote, “New technologies and techniques offered sudden hope to areas that had been passed over for centuries” (4). For North Carolina towns like Durham, Rocky Mount, and Winston-Salem, the railroads meant rapid growth from small villages to busy centers of business, and that translated to more culture and entertainment. For example, Durham’s businessmen helped form the core of the African-American community that developed in areas of the city like Hayti, and which would create a thriving music and entertainment scene (43). On the other hand, share croppers continued to struggle to get by, and many left the area for points north in search of work, in what became known as the Great Migration. The families of Max Roach and Thelonious Monk were part of that movement. The Monks moved to New York in 1922; the Roaches moved there in 1928.

With the change in business and culture came changes in the music played around the state. Where string bands had once dominated, blues gained traction, thanks in part to the arrival of mail-order guitars. When guitars became more affordable and accessible in the early 20th century, some banjo players in North Carolina switched instruments—and helped create Piedmont blues. In his article “Appalachian Blues,” historian Barry Lee Pearson explains that Piedmont blues was played in the foothills of the Appalachians from Richmond, Virginia, to

Atlanta, Georgia (32). Piedmont blues developed a few years after the Mississippi Delta style popularized by Robert Johnson and Charley Patton. Building off the state's string band tradition of creating music for dancing with a strong rhythmic drive, North Carolina's style of blues developed its distinct character. Piedmont blues was known for its upbeat themes and rhythms—it was great for dancing, said historian and blues musician Waymon Meeks (Holeman). As a type of country blues, the Piedmont style was focused on “good-time dance rhythms” and centered around the guitar (Zolten 69). In his article “Piedmont Country Blues,” Bill Phillips described the style of blues found in North Carolina as “enthusiastic foot-tapping music” (56). The demands of dancers helped Piedmont blues develop this way—it was meant to be danced to, while other blues forms were less focused on getting people moving.

Following in the African tradition, music remained an extension of life for North Carolinians in the early 20th century. People did not relegate music mostly to clubs and concert halls in the way we do today. Frank (Jim) Page, a factory worker from Durham, North Carolina, in a 1976 interview with Glenn Hinson, provided a view into how he experienced blues music in the early 20th century. Born in 1910 in the area outside of Durham, Page attended frolics by the age of 15. These parties provided the main form of entertainment for people in the countryside. A family opened up their house for the night for the neighbors to come cut loose. The next weekend, another family would do the same; the pattern continued throughout the year. These parties crossed racial lines, in that both black and white communities held house parties. Harvey Ellington, a white fiddler from Vaughan, North Carolina, said people would clear out their houses to host a party. “They’d take the bed and all out,” he said. “Then we’d play. Then they’d bring the furniture back in” (Tulos). Page first heard blues music at these kinds of house parties.

Page attended parties in Stagville, a former plantation north of Durham, which drew people from around the area. And Page came to dance. He practiced “buck dancing,” a form of solo dance also called flat-footing or jigging. The parties, which could last most of the night, featured music supplied by locals. The musicians who played house parties often were not professionals. Bastin said most musicians in the area played music part-time and worked at other jobs, such as in factories or mills, the rest of the time (206). Page said the musicians he saw did not play for the money. “They just loved it and they liked to come out in the country to have big dances,” he reminisced. For those who played music at parties, music was more of a passion than a profession at this time, one that was developed from within the family or community. Pearson said most musicians heard blues first in their homes or at house parties; the music was very much a part of family entertainment (43). Nina Simone learned ragtime and pop tunes from her father as he sang them around the house (17).

Page said the parties in Stagville started with slower blues—guitar and singing. But as more dancers arrived, the music tempo increased to a more upbeat style that included piano and brass instruments such as saxophones. Page’s experience was common, according to Pearson. In other parts of the South, blues displaced other forms of African-American dance music altogether. But in the Piedmont, blues was just one of many forms of dance music played at parties, which would include old-timey string band music, country, and jazz. While Piedmont blues evolved as a danceable form of blues, other forms of music provided the quicker beats the dancers wanted most, which meant the music changed as the party heated up. In other words, blues didn’t replace dance music, it augmented it—depending on the time and place, people might hear blues or ragtime, or a combination of both. This musical melting pot may be why the Piedmont blues retains a more danceable beat than other forms of blues.

But musicians did not cross one particular musical line: one either played blues or sacred music, but custom dictated the two should not mix. Chester Clark, who worked for American Tobacco Company in Durham and also performed as a musician around the area, said that many of his contemporaries considered blues and other secular music as evil. “I heard people say, ‘Boy, you alright picking your guitar, but don’t play the blues—the Devil will get you. Learn to play some good songs’” (Hinson). If you had a reputation as a blues player, the prevailing attitude was that you “ain’t got no business up in no church singing,” Clark remembered. However, several musicians who had been blues players would give that up and take their talents to the church later in their lives, especially as instruments became more welcome within the church.

But the secular musicians were certainly welcome in places where people worked. Work and music go hand-in-hand in African-American culture. According to Levine, African-American song—whether spirituals or folk tunes—accompanied work from slavery to the fields to the railroads and into the mills (208). Work songs made something they had to do anyway into something of their own. However, as work became more mechanized, workers found less time for music—though it didn’t disappear completely. In their article “Cotton Mill People: Work, Community, and Protest in the Textile South, 1880-1940,” Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Robert Korstad, and James Leloudis said that in the Piedmont, work shifted from farm to mill, but people didn’t leave behind the existing customs. “Instead, they fashioned familiar ways of thinking and acting into a distinctly new way of life,” they wrote (250). John Coltrane’s father was known to entertain guests and customers at his dry cleaning business, playing pop songs of the day on his ukulele and violin like “Sweetheart of Sigma Chi” (Tegnell 206). Lou Donaldson remembers hearing factory brass bands playing in his hometown of Badin—a band sponsored by

the factory and made up of factory workers—though they were usually playing marches, not blues.

In a report for the Federal Writer's Project (one of President Roosevelt's New Deal projects), writer Leonard Rapport said he encountered blues in another place in late 1930s Durham: on the street, near the tobacco warehouses. In a firsthand account from October 10, 1938, around midnight, Rapport found a blind guitarist and singer who said his name was Reverend Davis. Most likely the musician was Reverend Gary Davis, one of the few recorded blues musicians from Durham. Bastin said that the warehouse street music scene cropped up every year in the fall when the time came for tobacco auctions. Max Roach's family would have heard the blues outside the tobacco warehouses in Rocky Mount.

The Sound of Piedmont Blues

When you hear Piedmont blues, whether played by well-known artists like Blind Boy Fuller and Reverend Gary Davis or more regional practitioners like Etta Baker and John Dee Holeman, you're struck by how positive the sound is. Both in lyrics and chord choices, the music emotes cheer and energy. Blind Boy Fuller's 1935 recording of the traditional "Rag, Mama, Rag" demonstrates the uplifting nature of the genre. From the start of the song, Fuller strums chords on his guitar quickly and shifts chords frequently, creating a sense of forward motion to the piece; the tempo mimics the pace of the dancing that people would be doing to the music. He also rarely embellishes the tune with licks—his guitar mainly helps create a fast and steady rhythm. Compare that to Mississippi Delta blues guitarist Robert Johnson. On songs like "Ramblin' on My Mind," recorded in 1936, he frequently interrupts his strumming with interjections on his slide. For example, at 0:43 into his first version of the song found on *The Complete Recordings*, Johnson strums a chord for two beats then uses his slide to play several faster notes high on the

neck. The effect disrupts the flow of the song; Johnson wants you to listen to him, where Fuller seems more focused on getting you to dance to his music. While Delta blues can challenge your ear with abrupt changes in melody and dissonance, Piedmont blues favors consonance, resolving notes in ways that please the ear.

On some Piedmont blues tracks, you get the sense that the sole purpose of the song is to accompany dance. Listening to “Buckdance” from *Eight-Hand Sets and Holy Steps*, Alga Mae Hinton repeats the same guitar riff throughout the entire 1:58 length of the song, and the entire time we can hear someone buck dancing next to her, the syncopated steps providing the rhythmic interest to the song. In contrast to Hinton’s style, Delta bluesman Son House seemed more interested in melodic variety. On his 1930 recording of “My Black Momma,” he uses syncopated strumming and vocal affectations to make the song more interesting and the music more complex to entertain his listeners, rather than just providing a background for dancing.

Piedmont blues and Delta blues share much in common, but of the two blues styles, Delta blues proved more popular across the nation and had a greater impact on future generations of musicians. The Delta style’s individualism paralleled the emphasis on soloists that would develop in jazz, especially in the bebop era that Monk and Roach would help define, and during which Coltrane and Jimmy Heath would start their careers.

The Influence of Blues on North Carolina Jazz Musicians

As Lou Donaldson said, the jazz musicians who came from North Carolina were known for playing the blues. Several of them cut their teeth touring around the state and the South in rhythm-and-blues bands before graduating to jazz bands. Donaldson played blues in Winston-Salem and Greensboro clubs; early in his career, John Coltrane toured with rhythm and blues groups and played alongside Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson and Earl Bostic (Porter 25). You can

hear elements of the blues in most of the music created by Donaldson, Simone, Coltrane, and Monk, and in some songs and performances you can also hear the bright and cheerful spirit of Piedmont blues.

Donaldson lived in North Carolina the longest of the musicians I highlight, and his playing has the most in common with Piedmont blues. On his 1957 song “Play Ray,” Donaldson begins the song with a simple bright riff on saxophone. He pauses and a talking drum plays a short rhythmic fill; then the saxophone returns with a slight variation on the riff—but he keeps his improvisations close to the original melody. By keeping the melody simple and resolving it in a way that pleases the ear, Donaldson makes the song easy to dance to. It’s similar to Alga Mae Hinton’s “Buckdance” in its approach. “South of the Border” from his 1961 album *Gravy Train* also has much in common with Piedmont blues, favoring a major dominant sound, never straying too far from the melody, and keeping the rhythm steady for dancing.

Despite spending much of his youth immersed in North Carolina’s culture and touring with several rhythm-and-blues bands, Coltrane favored “serious blues” in his own compositions instead of the more upbeat Piedmont style. Lewis Porter notes that Coltrane’s blues tended to have a minor quality, especially when compared to the major dominant sound of jazz saxophonists Charlie Parker or Lester Young (Porter 124). “Blue Train,” “Equinox,” and “Chronic Blues” are just a few examples of the minor blues he favored. “I have a natural feel for a minor blues,” Coltrane said (124). But Coltrane also composed some fast moving blues tunes that demonstrate similar characteristics to the Piedmont blues style. On his 1957 blues song “Locomotion,” Coltrane opts for a quick tempo, a major key, and a relatively straightforward melody. In his solos he varies the melody widely, but he doesn’t stretch it as far as he often would; he simplifies the improvisation to keep the composition easier for listeners to follow.

Reverend Gary Davis used a comparable style in many of his songs. In the 1935 recording of “I’m Throwin’ Up My Hand” he strums a standard blues chord progression quickly during each verse, and uses the spaces between the verses to play rapid runs up and down the scale.

Similarly, “Mary’s Blues,” another 1957 song Coltrane recorded with baritone saxophonist Pepper Adams, focuses on the major dominant sound and stays more focused on a melody built from only a few notes that are repeated frequently.

Thelonious Monk and Max Roach left North Carolina before Piedmont blues became too prevalent, and thus they show little influence of the music. Monk definitely preferred a complex blues in his career; he would play 20 chords in a blues, not three or four. During a jam at Minton’s in the 1940s, Monk rebuked a new player who couldn’t keep up with the blues he was playing. “That’s not the way we play the blues here. We changed all that,” Monk said (Kelley 67).

The Changing Music Scene

The way people listened to blues, and all music, changed dramatically as recorded music became more prevalent. Frank Page, who had lived in rural areas until he moved to Durham in the 1930s, said that in Durham he danced in clubs called “piccolo joints” (Hinson). Clubs such as Tree-in-the-House on Fayetteville Road and similar places at Mill Grove and on Pine Street had a piano and a piccolo (a jukebox). The piccolos ended the need for amateur musicians to entertain the crowds. Some people would even rent piccolos for their parties in their homes. “In the late years, they had nothing but piccolos,” Page said. “You hardly ever had live musicians after the piccolos came out.” That also meant less of a chance for regional music like Piedmont blues to be heard. The local flavor of music was overwhelmed by national trends. Delta blues became foundational in the blues that developed in subsequent years, such as the electric blues of Muddy Waters.

But Piedmont blues carved its niche in North Carolina, and you can still hear it played by artists such as John Dee Holeman, especially during the active outdoor concert season that flourishes each summer. The Music Maker Foundation, based in Hillsborough, North Carolina helps older blues musicians pay their bills, but also puts on tours around the country, providing a platform for Holeman, Ironing Board Sam, and other regional players to be heard.

Sacred Music in the 20th Century: Shout It Out

The 20th century witnessed increased repression for African Americans in North Carolina, but not all freedoms could be legislated away. The freedom of religion, which blacks seized upon after Emancipation, continued to be a cornerstone in their lives in the early 1900s, with new denominations created to meet the individual worship desires of different groups. Along with the continued religious freedom, sacred music evolved and developed in the state. Prominently, the new churches encouraged instruments inside the church, which led to even more lively renditions of spirituals and hymns. In North Carolina, one new church and the trombone-based music it pioneered became especially popular and filled the church halls—and streets of North Carolina’s cities—with its energetic sounds.

The Evolution of Religion in the 20th Century

After developing their own Baptist and Methodist congregations in the 19th century, African Americans in the late 19th and early 20th century branched out more, often in reaction to restrictions imposed by the existing church organizations. These new religious organizations had direct impact on music played in the churches.

The existing black churches changed during the late 1800s, becoming less locally controlled. For example, though Baptist churches were independent, a movement began in the late 19th century to organize at a national level, and the first Baptist National Convention convened in 1880 (Southern 259). At these meetings, Baptist missionaries began to promote more Victorian values, and the national agenda trickled down into the independent local churches. The new values discouraged ecstatic singing and dancing; and repercussions followed for those that were caught “sinning”—the Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., censured any member caught dancing or drinking (Brothers 37). In many churches, the focus shifted away

from participation. That meant in some areas congregational singing gave way to a focus on the choir and soloists; lay preachers were replaced with trained ones (Brothers 38). In the wake of these changes, new independent churches, not under the auspices of the national organization, sprung up to better meet the desires of those pushed out by the restrictions.

The Holiness and Pentecostal movements emerged from this atmosphere. Both traditions are similar in that they are based in Protestantism. Protestant religions believe eternal salvation is a two-step process: justification, in which a person enters a relationship with God and his or her sins are forgiven; and sanctification, which results in a person's sinful nature being removed. The Holiness Movement believed in simultaneous justification and sanctification, while other Protestant denominations focused on justification (Dallam 42). For Holiness worshippers, the two happened at baptism. Within the Holiness Movement, several branches developed, including one known as Sanctified that was popular among black Christians who disdained the national restrictions being enforced by Baptists and Methodists (Sanders 5). But the splintering didn't stop with the Holiness Movement. Between 1906 and 1909, several Holiness church founders participated in the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, out of which the Pentecostal movement was born (Southern 260). The Holiness and Pentecostal churches both emphasize spirit baptism, but Pentecostals believe a person must speak in tongues (glossolalia) to prove his or her spirit baptism, while Holiness believers don't (Sanders 5). And the formation of new churches didn't stop with those two. After the Azusa Street Revival, many groups broke away from the main Holiness and Pentecostal movements with their own interpretations of how to achieve salvation. Several others arose independently but combined elements from both movements; one such church, called the United House of Prayer for All People, gained a particularly strong hold in Charlotte.

The United House of Prayer was led by Charles Manuel Grace, who was known as Daddy Grace. Grace's church was started in Massachusetts in 1919, but it gained its largest following in Charlotte's Second Ward neighborhood, a center for black life in Charlotte. Grace opened his first church in Charlotte in 1926, and over the next few years other United House of Prayer churches sprouted in North Carolina cities, including Raleigh. The church theology was most similar to Pentecostal, but was closer to Holiness on some minor issues (Dallam 44). Church members believed in divine healing, and Grace acquired a reputation as a healer—drawing many to the church (45). Grace himself was a flamboyant leader, riding in a red, white, and blue Cadillac, and often wearing a fur coat (Hafar 165). The church held services every night of the week, with an extended service on Sunday—which frequently lasted up to three hours. The church was known for hearty social clubs, called auxiliaries. Grace wanted church to be fun (Dallam 61). And music played a big part in his plan for that.

Music in 20th Century North Carolina Churches

Along with the shift in religious values came a change in attitudes toward having instruments in church. Sacred music in the 19th century was almost solely vocal music; but the Holiness movement ushered a range of instruments inside the walls of the church—including drums, guitars, and horns (Hinson 7). This encouraged many musicians, especially blues artists, to switch to spirituals and put their music talents in service of the praise of God. Out of these changes, new forms of sacred music developed, including gospel. As spirituals had come from the slave experience, gospel songs emerged from the post-slavery black experience and how to live in a world that fell far short of the promised land. Kip Lornell in the liner notes to *Classical African American Gospel from the Smithsonian Folkways* says, “While hymns are directed towards praising God, the messages of gospel songs are aimed at humankind—especially how to

address the trials and tribulations of everyday life” (5). Gospel escaped the church walls, too.

The form became a commercial success in the 1930s, as recordings of four-part harmony quartets grew popular (6). In a 1976 interview with Glenn Hinson, Reginald Mitchiner said they had fun working at the Liggett & Myers tobacco factory, and that people often sang gospel and spiritual songs throughout a shift. He remembered that a coworker Jim, who sang spirituals in church on the weekends, would “sing all day long” at work. A factory floor would have about a hundred people working on it, and many would join in the song.

Many of the new churches injected more than new sounds into song; they brought a different beat into the mix. Sanctified churches were famous for rhythm, movement, and communal participation (Brothers 40). From ecstatic hand claps to syncopated foot stomps, the rhythms of Holiness churches offered more outward displays of emotion than were found in Baptist or Methodist congregations. Many future jazz musicians loved what they heard coming from inside Holiness churches. Nina Simone said in her autobiography that the music at the Holiness church near her Methodist chapel “sounded like it came straight from Africa” and she would go to the Holiness services just to “get into that beat” (17). Dizzy Gillespie was also entranced by the rhythms he heard coming from the Sanctified church down the street from his house. “I learned the meaning of rhythm there,” Gillespie said (Brothers 38). Lou Donaldson said they’d have “shouting sessions” in church, and that “when they clap their hands in rhythm, all that kind of stuff had a lot to do with the way I play.”

Grace and his United House of Prayer built off the energetic music coming from Holiness churches. Grace developed a custom hymnal that included standard hymns as well as gospel songs. He said he didn’t want the music to be morbid, so the hymns included accompaniment by

piano, banjos, and tambourines (Dallam 61). And, rather unusually, brass instruments became a focal point of the music, which came to be known as shout band music.

Shout bands were exclusive to United House of Prayer churches, but the explosive energy of the bands could be heard throughout the state thanks to the parades that the United House of Prayer was fond of putting on. Brothers says the African-American parade tradition in cities like New Orleans offered disenfranchised Negroes a chance to assertively move their culture through city spaces (21). Grace took advantage of the stage to promote his church. United House of Prayer parades in Charlotte would draw 20,000 to 30,000 people (Dallam 145). It's very possible that future jazz musicians who lived in North Carolina in the 1940s—like Coltrane, Donaldson, and Simone—would have heard and seen the lively parades on their city streets.

The Sound of Shout Band Music

Shout band music developed a distinctive sound, much closer to rhythm and blues than other sacred music genres of the 20th century, like gospel. The characteristics of the all-male shout band included sousaphone, drums, and, most notably, several trombones—often a half dozen or more (Dallam 62). In performance, Tom Hanchett, a historian at Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte, says the music sounds more like a collage than a composition—it was a collection of phrases that the community knows (10). At first listen, the energy and sound of shout bands may remind listeners of Dixieland jazz, with its big, brassy sound and dynamic rhythm. For example, a 1991 recording of “Get in Me Jesus” by the Tigers, a shout band from North Carolina, features multiple trombones playing a melody that includes heterophony and an uplifting, propulsive beat that would be at home on Bourbon Street. But instead of taking turns improvising after the group states the melody, as they would in Dixieland, the band continues to repeat the melody until it switches to “the drive,” a short rhythmic figure that is repeated as the

lead singer improvises over it (Hanchett 8). The music focused more on the group rather than the individual. In form, then, shout band music is closer to the gospel quartet music that was being recorded at the same time that Grace's church bands were forming. Listening to the 1936 recording of "Good News, the Chariot Is Coming" by Durham gospel quartet Bright Moon (found on *Carolina Gospel Quartets, Vol. 2*), we find the same structure as the Tigers used, with the melody stated and repeated, without the individual improvisation. However, the energy of gospel quartet falls far short of the shout band, with the lack of drive provided by percussion particularly noticeable.

Despite the emphasis on the group rather than the individual, there was still room for improvisation in shout band music; on a song like the Tigers' 1999 recording of "Oh Fix Me," we can hear different trombones vary from the melody at times. In fact, the bands were encouraged to improvise in the songs to better match the emotions of the congregations (Hanchett 7). Almost all shout songs are in duple time, which helps provide the up-tempo feeling and helps keep the congregation moving. For example, on "It's Time to Make a Change" by Madison's Lively Stones (found on *Saints' Paradise: Trombone Shout Bands from the United House of Prayer*), out of Washington, D.C., the snare and bass drum keep an easy-to-follow "oom-pah" rhythm that was sure to get churchgoers worked up.

The Influence of 20th Century Sacred Music in North Carolina

While we can hear elements of 20th century sacred music in the works of the jazz musicians who came from North Carolina, it's hard to extract the specific qualities of the state's sacred music in their respective styles. As I've discussed, the Coltranes, Donaldsons, and Waymons were Methodists, and therefore less likely to spend significant time in the Holiness churches or the United House of Prayer churches. By and large, the newer churches like the United House of

Prayer attracted a poorer demographic (Dallam 42). And since the families of the musicians were all deeply engaged in—and in many cases employed by—their local congregations, they were heavily invested in the established religions. But we know that Nina Simone listened often to music at the Holiness church near her, and, because of its prominence for many major jazz musicians in the country, it's likely that all of the musicians knew of the style.

We can hear some examples of the characteristics of music from Holiness churches in their later compositions—such as complex rhythms, up-tempo paces, and ecstatic outbursts. John Coltrane's "Resolution" from *A Love Supreme* exhibits many of those traits. If we think of the "Acknowledgement," the first song on the album, as the build up, then "Resolution," the next song, is the release, where the congregation shouts out with the spirit. "Resolution" begins with a taut bass solo, but breaks loose at 0:22 with a loud and high-pitched burst of sound from Coltrane's horn. The melody he plays isn't fast, but it is full of spirit. Jazz critic Gary Giddins identifies some very Holiness characteristics on Coltrane's 1961 live recording of "Chasing the Trane" from his *Live at the Village Vanguard* release. On that song, Giddins notes how Coltrane drains away his virtuosic technique—which he famously refined through hours of practice a day—and instead opts for "sanding the shine off his sound, indulging in a glossary of false notes, overtones, and vocalisms"—much as the Holiness church favored emotionalism over structure (479). Nina Simone also shows that Sanctified spirit in her live version of "Mississippi Goddam" from 1964's *Nina Simone in Concert*. At the 2:16 into the song her band shouts verbal response to each verse. "But that's just the trouble," she sings. Her band shouts, "Do it slow!" She sings, "Washing the windows," and they respond again, "Do it slow!" This continues for several verses. They repeat a similar pattern at the end of the song, and then the song builds in fervor until it ends with her shouting, "That's it!" The shout sounds spontaneous, as if she was caught

in the spirit of the moment. These Holiness influences certainly weren't specific to North Carolina, though, and could have been attributed to the influence of any Holiness church throughout the country.

The sounds of shout bands, which were much more popular within the state than elsewhere in the South, would have had a more limited influence on many of the musicians I'm spotlighting, since they had left the state before its rise. Coltrane still lived in High Point until 1943, so he could have heard some of the trombone-heavy sounds. Coltrane chose to use trombonist Curtis Fuller on his 1957 album *Blue Train*, at a time when trombones weren't as common in jazz as they had been in the big band era. And Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" features duple meter, which the shout bands favored. But these are hard to attribute to the United House of Prayer music. Instead, I see a stronger influence on another style of music that emerged a few years later: funk. North Carolina produced a high concentration of influential funk musicians, including George Clinton from Kannapolis and Maceo Parker from Kinston. In addition, several of Parker's bandmates in the James Brown Band came from Kinston. Funk's emphasis on brass horns and up-tempo rhythms have a strong similarity to the sacred music of shout bands.

Still Blowing

While the religious landscape has continued to change since the 1940s and 1950s, the United House of Prayer shout music bands still have a place in the Southeast. The bands don't play as often outside the church any more (Hanchett 8), and Grace's grand church on McDowell Street in Charlotte's Brooklyn neighborhood was torn down in 1970. But the organization survives with a presence in 29 states—and Charlotte maintains the second most active center for the denomination (8). Videos and recordings demonstrate that shout music bands can still be heard

in Charlotte and other cities, playing a style very similar to that heard 60 years ago. Bands such as the Tigers and the Clouds of Heaven keep the tradition alive.

North Carolina: Fertile Ground for Jazz?

In looking at the musical heritage of black North Carolinians, I've identified several potential sources that could have helped shaped the jazz musicians who came from the state. But it's equally important to acknowledge other influences that would have shaped the musicians, too—ones that almost all people in the South would have encountered, such as travelling musicians, recorded music, and radio.

With the laying of rail lines throughout the state in the 1870s and 1880s, regional musical styles intermixed more quickly. In addition to making it easier for touring songsters to travel from town to town—where they would often play with locals and exchange songs—many itinerant workers carried instruments with them and would take songs from one job site to the next (Ayers 235). The free movement of musicians meant that the lines between Piedmont and Delta blues, for example, would be more porous, especially in the cities. The effect would likely have been lessened in rural areas where fewer outside musicians travelled, and may have been a reason that string band music remained relevant in North Carolina for so long.

As jazz became a bigger cultural force in the 1930s, towns in North Carolina saw their share of visits from touring big bands, and they made a big impression. In his interview with Glenn Hinson, Reginald Mitchiner recalled that in Durham, the bands played in tobacco warehouses that had the floors cleared and a few chairs brought in to line the walls. Popular artists such as Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway entertained the dancers in the warehouses. “And brother, they’d really blow the top off a building,” Mitchiner said. In an interview with Walter Weare in 1979, Viola Turner, a treasurer for North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance in Durham, remembered Ellington, as well as Count Basie and Lionel Hampton, coming to the Civic Center and warehouses. “Virtually all of the big bands have been here at one time or the other.”

Mitchiner mentioned a few local big bands, such as the Nighthawks and the Carolina Serenaders, but local musicians seemed to focus less on jazz than musicians elsewhere in the country, at a time when jazz was the most popular music. Mitchiner remembered that people heard jazz most often in the halls and clubs of Durham's Hayti neighborhood. "People in the countryside would be listening to guitar music because they weren't exposed to jazz," Mitchiner observed. It's likely that guitar music was Piedmont blues.

By the 1940s, with jazz firmly entrenched as a musical form, the local jazz musicians were more likely to play what came from New York and Chicago rather than the Tar Heel state. Lou Donaldson said that in college, he played with a musician named Billy Coles who had experience performing with the big bands. "He'd go up in the summer and play in Boston with the big bands. He brought all the arrangements back to the college, and we played them," Donaldson remembered. And by that time, records and record players were commonplace, breaking all physical barriers when it came to hearing the latest sounds coming from around the country. John Coltrane said he admired Lester Young—from Kansas City—when he first started playing alto saxophone (Porter 30). Donaldson said that though there were no jazz radio stations that he could pick up on his radio, one disc jockey at WBET in Charlotte named Grady Cole would play Louis Armstrong's "St. James Infirmary," which had "Bye Bye Blackbird" on the flip side. Of course, as Donaldson remembers it, that was the only jazz record the station had, so he wasn't getting a major dose of the national scene over the airways. Instead he was more likely to hear country and bluegrass, like the Grand Ole Opry. Exposure to these broad influences may have helped him—and the other musicians from North Carolina—create his own sound.

I've focused this exploration on primarily African and African-American musical influences. But we shouldn't discount the influence of European musical traditions on the jazz musicians

that came from North Carolina. Nina Simone began taking formal classical piano lessons at age 8, studying Bach extensively (Cohodas 35). Throughout her childhood she maintained a personal goal to become a classical pianist. John Coltrane first formally learned music in a community band, where he played alto horn and clarinet (Porter 12). In high school, he played in the school band, where he learned additional basic Western musical traditions. Lou Donaldson's mother was a classical piano teacher; he also played in his high school and college bands, where they focused on marches. Jimmy Heath, who lived part time in Wilmington, says in his autobiography that he, too, played in his high school's marching band (7). In these situations, the artists were learning from the canon of Western music, not from the local variants.

With a wealth of potential influences, it is hard to point to a few and say they were responsible for North Carolina's production of such impactful jazz musicians. But at the same time, the state's musical heritage is rich and shouldn't be discounted.

The Influence of North Carolina on Jazz

Billy Taylor may have dismissed the influence North Carolina had on the jazz musicians who came from the state, but, as we've seen, North Carolina was fertile ground for African-American musical traditions. The state had its share of sacred and secular music in the period from the Civil War to the mid-20th century. Lining out, while popular throughout the country with African Americans, had its particular flavor in North Carolina, focusing on the upbeat shout style; and the irrepressible energy of shout band music developed in the 20th century out of the United House of Prayer churches. Secular music in the state got people dancing with the rhythmic drive of string band music, and kept it going with Piedmont blues, an up-tempo variation that differed from the more popular Delta style. If we look at what these music styles have in common, a North Carolina influence emerges: an upbeat, energetic music that gets people moving. Though

we can't say that the influence was unique, enough connections exist between the state and its music that we can't dismiss it, either.

On the surface, we can find this energy and approach in some of the songs composed by Thelonious Monk, Max Roach, John Coltrane, Nina Simone, Lou Donaldson, and other jazz musicians who have roots in North Carolina. Whether we call it a "bluesy" feel or the willingness to let emotions take over, these artists share a connection with the state's music. The matter would benefit from a more technical analysis of the players' compositions compared with the defining elements of the musical styles I've identified. Without this, it is hard to say what influence the state truly had on their music. In addition to direct musical influences, one can see the impact life in the state made on their outlooks—which can translate to musical compositions. For example, Roach, Simone, and Coltrane were all outspoken civil rights advocates, and each composed songs about racism: Max Roach created the *Freedom Now Suite*; Nina Simone penned "Mississippi Goddam;" and John Coltrane wrote "Alabama" in response to a Ku Klux Klan attack.

Highlighting these North Carolina musical styles is a start to identifying the impact the state had on the jazz musicians who were born and lived here. Even among those who left when they were young, the connections that had been made—often through their families who would have heard and internalized this music, bringing it with them as they migrated north to Philadelphia and New York—persisted, whether obvious or not. North Carolina may not have a jazz scene, but it did play a part in the development of jazz.

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